The Routledge Handbook of Festivals

Judith Mair

The value of festivals

Publication details

Donald Getz, Tommy D. Andersson, John Armbrecht, Erik Lundberg

Published online on: 22 Aug 2018

How to cite :-

Accessed on: 06 Dec 2023

3

THE VALUE OF FESTIVALS

Donald Getz, Tommy D. Andersson, John Armbrecht and Erik Lundberg

Introduction

This chapter addresses the conceptual and philosophical issues associated with placing a value on a festival from many perspectives. The emphasis is placed on providing a theoretical and practical framework within which value issues can be addressed, and further research suggested. Our approach is derived from the edited book *The Value of Events* (Lundberg, Armbrecht, Andersson & Getz 2017). The starting point is definitional, looking at the key terms, then providing a framework for exploring value perspectives. In the concluding section we identify gaps and suggest a research agenda.

Building a framework

Brown, Getz, Pettersson and Wallstam (2015) carefully examined definitions and usages of ‘value’ and related terminology. Important synonyms for the noun ‘value’ include worth, utility, advantage, benefit, profit, merit and usefulness. These suggest how the value of an event might be determined, but raise the questions ‘by whom’ and ‘from whose perspective’? Accordingly, evaluations need to be clear about both the ‘subject’ and the ‘object’ of analysis (Andersson & Armbrecht 2017). Valuation is also implicit in discussions of festival impacts, although this requires an indication of whether or not an identified or imputed impact is good, bad or neutral, and from whose perspective.

One meaning of ‘value’ pertains to a person’s or group’s values, based on culture and ethics, and influencing what a person becomes and does. In this sense, values determine (at least in part) attitudes towards festivals and influence what a group or society does by way of organising and facilitating (or regulating) planned events. McCarthy, Ondaatje, Laura and Brooks (2004) distinguished between private and public value and the extrinsic and intrinsic value dimensions. Intrinsic value is derived from intellectual, emotional and spiritual experiences and relates to the notion that something is valuable in itself. Extrinsic value stems from utility and exchanges that provide tangible benefits or value either to individuals (including social groups and subcultures) or to society as a whole.

Andersson, Armbrecht and Lundberg (2012) have provided a pertinent framework (see Figure 3.1). The vertical axis distinguishes between the intrinsic and extrinsic value
The value of festivals

perspectives, while the horizontal axis separates individual versus societal values. Note that ‘impacts’ in this model can be interpreted as potential positive and negative values attributed to festivals.

**Metrics**

Measurement of intrinsic value is often resisted but can be approached through measures such as willingness to pay valuation, or by relying upon the opinions and attitudes of stakeholders. Indeed, surveys of visitors’ and local residents’ impact perceptions and attitudes towards events are a standard form of value measurement (e.g. Delamere, Wankel & Hinch 2001; Fredline, Jago & Deery 2003; Small 2007; Woosnam, Van Winkle & An 2013). Claims are often made that culture or the arts do not require justification; therefore festivals should be judged worthwhile without resort to metrics. This is a controversial position to take, especially when the countervailing argument is that culture has major economic impact; in that context, many festivals have conducted economic impact studies.

Logically, both costs and negative impacts should be taken into consideration when assigning worth intrinsically or calculating a quantitative measure of value (see, for example, Deery & Jago 2010 for a comparison of benefits and costs), but this is not always done. Those promoting a festival might be attitudinally ‘blind’ to costs or any criticism, while impact forecasts and post-event assessments too often ignore externalities such as pollution, security, or inflation; opportunity costs are seldom weighed up. Little is known about long-term cumulative festival and event impacts or the synergistic effects of managed portfolios. The study of whole populations of festivals and events is in its infancy (Andersson, Getz & Mykletun 2013; Getz & Andersson 2016).

To ‘prove’ an impact requires strong evidence, even experiments, to demonstrate cause and effect, and this is seldom possible. As well, many of the imputed roles of festivals, particularly related to society and culture, are therefore highly subjective.

**Synergies**

Portfolios of festivals, managed for policy and strategy, present opportunities for synergies and long-term sustainability. Whereas one festival can enhance a city’s image or help in its
Donald Getz et al.

(re)positioning, many festivals can offer greater balance, reduce risk and generate efficiencies. Theory on event portfolios is a relatively new area within event studies, with an early model by Getz (1997) suggesting an event-tourism strategy for destinations and Ziakas (2013) emphasising the potential synergies for destinations.

A ‘convergence model’ (Getz & Page 2016) demonstrates how value is increased by combinations of event forms and functions. Hallmark Events, defined as permanent, traditional events that become institutions, typically reflect this convergence (Getz & Page 2016). The appeal of these festivals, and the values they create, extend to individuals, groups, society, the economy and culture. By evolution or strategy, festivals and events combining the major domains of economic, symbolic and social exchange with value for individuals achieve much greater power – to attract tourists, appeal to a wider range of resident interests, and possibly to become more sustainable.

**Spatial and temporal considerations**

Value perspectives on festivals vary over time and through space, and this is a rather neglected area of research. Benckendorff and Pearce (2012) modelled the stages of experience, namely pre, on-site and post, and the differing psychological experiences of spectators/attendees, performers and participants, and elite participants. Personality, motivation and involvement figure into pre-event experiences, while the on-site experience relates to role theory, identity, liminality, flow and mindfulness. Phenomenological research on festival experiences is therefore a key theory-building methodology (Ziakas & Boukas 2014).

Spatial and temporal issues increase when the discussion turns to portfolios and populations of events. Portfolios are managed for specific purposes, and many managers want to measure return on investment (ROI). As ‘assets’, festivals should each contribute to the overall ROI of the investors, and they might, over time, lose their asset value or, as Hallmark Events, gain asset value. Whole populations of events are subject to forces of ecological constraints that could enhance or diminish the value of individual festivals over time. Competition for resources is a major influence, including competition for audiences and competition for political support. Too many events in one area could result in serious financial problems for all of them, leading to failures.

**Cross-cultural variations**

Very limited research has been cross-cultural in nature. One study by Schneider and Backman (1996) suggests that basic motivations for attending festivals are the same everywhere, and it is certainly logical to assume that both generic social/leisure benefits and festival-specific benefits accrue to people the world over. But this is an area of uncertainty, as religious beliefs, social norms and cultural traditions are bound to have an effect on how festivals are valued from the different perspectives.

**The people perspective**

The value of festivals is a well-established theme within the ‘classical’ sociological and anthropological literature. Getz (2010), in his literature review, identified the following themes: myth, ritual and symbolism; ceremony and celebration; spectacle; *communitas*; host-guest interactions (and the role of the stranger); liminality, the carnivalesque and festivity; authenticity and commodification; pilgrimage; and a considerable amount of political debate.
The value of festivals


Value to the individual is the most logical starting point, as most other perspectives are in some way aggregations. It is largely an area of psychological and social-psychological research, including the nature of the festival experience. Therefore, most of the value is intrinsic in nature. A potential benefit or value proposition is not of real value to the individual, unless they believe it to be so; therefore perception and attitude studies abound – usually regarding perceived impacts or costs and benefits.

The potential intrinsic benefits accrue to individuals directly through attendance (spectator or audience member) or engagement (e.g., volunteer, participant or performer). These are direct use values, but there can also be indirect use value creation when visitors ascribe wider benefits to festivals, such as an appreciation of other experiences at the destination during the festival visit. Perhaps the most studied perspective is satisfaction, as it has marketing implications, and satisfaction is often linked (such as through path mapping) to motivations, anticipated and perceived quality of programme and service, or other variables related to value. Numerous motivation studies have revealed much about the expectations of benefits to be attained, and it is useful to distinguish between those that are generic to events and leisure, such as socialising or escaping from boredom, and those that are specific to the festival (for example de Geus, Richards & Toepoel 2016), such as the entertainment or food. Both seeking and escaping are primary motivational factors.

Value can also accrue to individuals even if they do not attend festivals. Non-use valuation of events (e.g., Andersson et al. 2012; Gration, Raciti, Getz & Andersson 2016; Dwyer & Forsyth in Lundberg et al. 2017) takes into account the fact that people value them for providing choices (this is option value) and because they are perceived to be good for non-personal reasons like community and economic development. Non-use valuation also covers legacy value, being the passing on of traditions or the consideration given to younger generations and their needs. Value for the family is also an emerging line of research.

People form into many social groups, and these can be thought of as communities of interest or identity. The primary values relate to personal and group identity but can also include the legitimation of lifestyle or political positions. Ethnic identification can be included here and in the wider perspective of culture. Numerous ethnic-themed festivals around

---

**Figure 3.2** Three main interdependent perspectives on festival values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE</th>
<th>ECONOMY</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual (consumer, volunteer, participant)</td>
<td>Jobs and entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Built environment (design; heritage; livability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Organisations and institutions</td>
<td>Ecological systems (conservation; restoration; sustainability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community of interest (social world, sub culture)</td>
<td>Business (family; corporation)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community (places)</td>
<td>Industry sector (hospitality, tourism, retail, entertainment)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society and culture; the arts</td>
<td>Economy (local, regional, national international)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics; ideology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government and nation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
the world, many related to diaspora, reflect the high value placed by groups on celebration shared with society as a whole.

Many people are engaged in ‘serious leisure’ (as used by Mackellar 2009, based on the theories of Stebbins 1982) and belong to ‘social worlds’ (from Unruh 1980) which can mean that a given festival fosters and reinforces personal and social identity. Semiotic or symbolic value is important to communities of interest and identity. ‘Iconic’ events, in this context, hold symbolic value for those who are highly involved in a given leisure or lifestyle pursuit (on involvement see Kim, Scott & Crompton 1997; for iconic events see Getz & McConnell 2013).

The consumer perspective takes us into the realm of extrinsic valuation, as consumers are those who purchase an experience or product. Accordingly, they are exchanging something of value (money, time, effort) for expected and usually defined benefits, but also for co-created experiences. Measuring consumer satisfaction and future intentions is a very common research approach that can be used as both a marketing evaluation tool and a way to understand more theoretically what people value about the festival experience.

Prebensen (in Lundberg et al. 2017) argued that the key for events and destinations is to create value to attract the customer to visit the event and the destination. In the attempt to attract locals and tourists to visit an event, the event develops, facilitates and communicates potential experience value, i.e. emotional, social and epistemic value. Goolaup and Mossberg (in Lundberg et al. 2017) provided an overview of consumer culture studies and concluded that social value of festivals occurs when an individual associates himself/herself with a specific socio-economic or cultural-ethnic group. Within these consumption communities, there are networks of meanings, values, outlook and lifestyle practices that are shared by specific socio-economic milieus.

The community of place perspective refers to the common interests of people living together, whether whole cities or particular neighbourhoods. The value of festivals in this context is primarily intrinsic in nature, linked to place identity and attachment, pride, community spirit or community development. However, this is easily turned into extrinsic valuation when civic authorities, or politicians, exploit these feelings for other purposes. The ‘eventful city’ as articulated by Richards and Palmer (2010) refers to the purposeful creation of places in which festivals and events figure prominently, achieving multiple goals. Colombo and Richards (in Lundberg et al. 2017) have argued that Barcelona, as an example, obtained different forms of value from the studied event and, in turn, delivered different types of value to the event, which are important in the ‘knowledge economy’ or the ‘network society’.

Politics and ideology complicate matters greatly, because celebrations of all kinds can be subverted to particular ideological aims. Is the purpose of a festival to foster community development and social integration, or to make certain politicians or parties look like they care? Will dissent on the expenditure or meanings ascribed to festivals be tolerated or repressed? Political discourse on the meanings and effects of festivals is essential. In one school of thought, festivals and rituals bind people together in communities and cultures (Durkheim 1912), while in another they reflect and encourage disagreement and even disputation of the meanings and impacts of events. Wood (in Lundberg et al. 2017) stated that leisure events are inherently political, and therefore the power embedded in practices, messages and commitments must be considered.

The perspective of government and the nation is often directly linked to politics and ideology. However, all governments have a regulatory interest in festivals and events, as well as decisions to make about spending, place marketing or image making, and fostering national pride. Intrinsic values like national pride and feelings of solidarity can easily be exploited by propaganda and manipulation of funding, resulting in extrinsic values coming to the
The value of festivals

where. Frew and White (2015), for example, noted that national identity and commemorative events are strongly connected, and they discussed anniversaries and commemorative events in the context of Australian national identity, collective memory and how the significance of these commemorations may change from generation to generation. The potential of events to communicate social messages and influence attitudes and behaviour has been analysed as social marketing through events (Jutbring 2017).

The final people perspective, that of society as a whole, is challenging. Often the values assigned to festivals are group- or place-specific, and debate or conflict can erupt because of differing perspectives on meanings. Many of the purported benefits of festivals, such as social capital formation (e.g. Quinn & Wilks 2013) and social integration (e.g. Packer & Ballantyne 2010), apply to society as a whole and are presumably valued by both residents and government for improving welfare. However, demonstrating how this works is difficult, and the metrics employed (such as crime statistics, networking, or public attitudes) are not likely to be accepted by everyone.

Economic perspective

Largely the realm of extrinsic valuation, the economic perspective often starts with the simplest metric, jobs. Entrepreneurial opportunities can be included here, with the observation that festivals offer many for-profit opportunities. However, festivals generate few direct jobs, and the number of direct and indirect jobs created is only going to be significant when many events and event venues are combined into a large and competitive portfolio that together create a stable upward shift of demand.

Festivals are very important in the mandates of many institutions (i.e. educational, religious, cultural, scientific) and are the raison d’être for many not-for-profit festival organisations. Institutions use festivals and other events for their own purposes, including raising money and keeping members and volunteers active. Training might be important, as festivals also engage numerous volunteers who might benefit from the experience and inherent networking. The very existence of festival organisations is determined by their ability to generate funds, and this ultimately means attracting and satisfying attendees. They often are public service oriented, a fact that places them in a unique social category.

Private companies and corporations benefit from festivals in many ways. Sometimes their involvement is altruistic, but mostly it is part of marketing, sales and branding strategies. Numerous suppliers are partners with festivals, and the entire festival/event sector is often co-dependent with the corporate world, as sponsorship is a major source of funding. This results in a blending of intrinsic and extrinsic valuation that can become quite complex. While economic values are intended to accrue to everyone, individual businesses and corporations gain from their association with festivals through sponsorship and co-branding.

Tourism is the industry sector most closely linked to festivals and events, benefitting from destination image enhancement, animation and tourist expenditure. The relationship between festivals and tourism is sometimes uneasy or unwelcome. Many festivals are not large enough or marketed in a way that appeals to tourist organisations and are therefore ignored. Others can be exploited, and their authenticity can be diminished by over-commercialisation. To the tourism/hospitality industry, festivals have the most tangible value when they attract tourists who otherwise would not come. To hotels, the value is usually measured as bed-nights generated, and preferably in off-peak times.

Local, regional and national economies present different perspectives on value. Many local festivals will have limited or no impact on regional or national economies, with most
of the transactions, including tourism, being local or domestic. On the other hand, mega-events hosted by the nation are bound to have many impacts on the local and regional economies of host cities. All too often benefits accrue to external interests, leaving communities and cities with disturbances and debt. One indicator of potential benefits is within the tax regime, namely how much the local economy gets from increased transactions and development; in some countries the nation benefits, but the local economy gets none.

Environmental perspective

Built-environment includes physical developments, from the scale of a single facility to large-scale urban redevelopment. In many cities this is facilitated through culture-led, or in some places event-led, strategies. The elements of such strategies include design for events (such as festival places), animation programmes and coordinated festival and event portfolios. Heritage buildings can sometimes be adapted to become event venues, or figure in the design of festival spaces. A related concept is the repositioning of cities where cities aim to change the way they are perceived as destinations.

Ecological systems cover nature conservation or restoration, and environmental sustainability issues. These are of concern to all residents and to governments, but the related values ascribed to festivals are seldom studied. These include raising awareness, direct education, social marketing, raising money and acting as role models through the implementation of green and sustainability standards (Andersson et al. 2013). Negative ecological values, revealed through ‘footprint analysis’, are generated by most events from travel to and from the event, and from accommodation and catering.

Conclusions

Given the almost innumerable value perspectives that can be taken on festivals, this chapter has focussed on providing a framework for analysis, research and theory development. The most important considerations pertain to intrinsic versus extrinsic approaches, as these reflect quite different philosophies of value and lead to quite different metrics. For intrinsic worth, the opinions or value judgements of stakeholders are most important; quantitative measures are often deemed unnecessary or are actually shunned. Extrinsic valuation generally reflects the instrumental worth of festivals from consumer, corporate and economic development perspectives. This gives rise to quantitative measures, usually expressed in monetary terms, such as direct expenditure or willingness to pay.

The second important consideration is that of scale, from the individual perspective through groups and places all the way to society as a whole. Intrinsic values accruing to and perceived by individuals and family units can also apply at broader levels of aggregation including society as a whole. Also discussed were matters of time and space as they influence value, and synergies that can arise. These aspects of festival valuation deserve greater attention.

Many research gaps remain, mostly to provide evidence on claims made about the benefits of festivals. Even where intrinsic value is ascribed and quantitative measures eschewed, evidence is required on who values festivals, why and under what circumstances. The ledger must also be balanced by considering the costs and negative impacts, many of which fall into the category of ‘felt’ or ‘perceived’.

Perceived value might increase and decrease over time, with (potentially) memorable experiences fading in value, or experiences collectively increasing in value as their experiences provide reinforcing meanings. Researchers can quantify some of these temporal dimensions.
The value of festivals

in several ways, including the monetary value of the travel and time committed to festival tourism (Mortazavi & Heldt in Lundberg et al. 2017). Since all activity has potential opportunity costs, the time and effort devoted to festival experiences can be valued. Looking at longer-term value creation, measures of satisfaction and future intentions are pertinent, and considering festival value in the light of serious leisure, involvement and social-world membership is important.

Researchers have examined perceived impacts of events and attitudes towards them with distance as an independent variable. It appears that the further one is away from a major event the less one perceives negative impacts and this spatial effect might also hold true to valuing the event. For example, do people without easy access to festivals value them in the same ways as those who can take close availability for granted?

The most notable gap pertaining to festival research is within the social and cultural range. Individuals are often asked about their perceptions and attitudes, and data have been collected from many surveys on the motivations and benefits felt by persons. But when the scope of discourse is elevated to that of social and cultural impacts, particularly the issues of ‘social capital’ and ‘cultural capital’, the literature is more about opinion than evidence. There is also evident resistance to such claims by economists, politicians and business interests, the people who are most impressed by hard data and ‘proof’.

The need for longitudinal research has been identified, with emphasis on cumulative impacts and the dynamics of festivals – singly, in managed portfolios and in whole populations. There is much to be gained by examining how synergies, networks or collaboration among festivals and between festivals and other policy domains can be facilitated. Another area that would benefit from being explored in greater detail, and cross-culturally, is non-use values. Just how do people in different cultural environments value festivals, especially when they are not getting direct use benefits? Additionally, although not specifically addressed in this chapter, the methodology of value measurement is a big concern. Beyond the economic perspective, how intrinsic values are to be considered is problematic. Whose claim of intrinsic value is actually listened to, and is evidence actually provided about attributed benefits of festivals?

Finally, what happens to a festival that loses its popular support or appeal? Does this indicate reduced value to society as a whole? And how do we measure the loss of a failed festival? Many have disappeared without a trace or have been reborn in new locations or with new themes and programmes. Anyone making the argument that festivals hold intrinsic social, cultural or artistic value has to acknowledge that it is neither permanent nor accepted as a given by all concerned parties.

References


